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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 6th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 12 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MacKay ..... (New Zealand)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Kuznetsov

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Item 119: Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B and 54/244

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04-54680 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Item 119: Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B and 54/244

1. **Mr. Elkhuizen** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the countries of the stabilization and association process (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that, given the importance of the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the benefit to the Organization of a strong internal oversight body, he wished to offer some general thoughts on the issue despite the absence of a report.

2. The Committee's discussions on the item in question should focus on three main issues: the degree of independence granted to OIOS in the context of its staffing and financial requirements; the timely availability and dissemination of OIOS reports and the potential creation of a mechanism to enable Member States to access a wider range of OIOS reports on a more informal basis; and the implementation and follow-up of OIOS recommendations. In that connection, he drew attention to the absence of a high-level mechanism to ensure coordination and follow-up, particularly in cases where the findings of OIOS had not been agreed upon with the department concerned.

3. The European Union would be interested in exploring further the Secretariat's views on those issues following consideration of the annual report, including the results of the self-assessment and the Secretary-General's comments thereon.

4. **Mr. Iosifov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation attached particular importance to the periodic review of the functioning of OIOS. In view of Member States' increasing financial contributions to the Organization, the oversight functions carried out by that Office were critical.

5. In order to enhance the effectiveness of OIOS in the implementation of its unique mandate, its operational independence should be strengthened. As regards reporting procedures, Member States must have access to relevant reports, including those containing management recommendations, so that they could influence the implementation of those recommendations. It was clear that the oversight activities of OIOS would yield no significant results if its recommendations were not implemented scrupulously and accompanied by appropriate due diligence procedures.

6. He welcomed efforts to coordinate the work of OIOS and the other oversight bodies, namely the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of Auditors, and urged those bodies to reciprocate them. Similar information-sharing activities should take place with other bodies within the United Nations system with a view to further fine-tuning reporting procedures.

7. **Ms. Zobrist Rentenaar** (Switzerland) said that the creation of OIOS was one of the most important reform measures adopted by the General Assembly over the preceding 10 years since it had created a culture of greater efficiency, effectiveness and accountability within the United Nations. Her delegation was particularly interested in the further strengthening of the operational independence of OIOS in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest and in the timely implementation of the recommendations of OIOS.

8. Since OIOS was an integral part of the Organization, it could not function with complete autonomy. The objective and effective fulfilment of its mandate would be possible, however, only if it remained independent of the audited entity, including in the area of management of its financial and human resources. Furthermore, the independence of OIOS was linked to the independence of its members and, more specifically, of its head. In that connection, the current term of office of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services should be extended to at least seven or eight years so as to enable the incumbent to fully address issues arising during his or her tenure and to bring United Nations practices more into line with the statutes of national audit institutions.

9. The implementation rate of OIOS recommendations was still too low. In order to increase compliance, rapid action by the Secretariat was needed, particularly during the first six months following the issuance of critical recommendations. There seemed to be no coordination mechanism in place to review the status of oversight recommendations or a systemic process for the use of information gathered by OIOS for executive decision-making.

10. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) expressed his satisfaction with the work of OIOS, which had contributed to the creation of a culture of accountability within the United Nations, identified millions of dollars worth of savings for Member States and brought to justice a number of individuals who had embezzled money from the Organization.

11. He suggested that, during its substantive consideration of the annual report of OIOS and the Secretary-General's comments thereon, the Committee might wish to address a number of issues relating to transparency, independence and accountability.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.

United Nations A/C.5/59/SR.7

General Assembly
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28 October 2004

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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 7th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 13 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MacKay ..... (New Zealand)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Kuznetsov

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Agenda item 112: Pattern of conferences

Agenda item 153: Financing of the United Nations Operation in Burundi

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04-54979 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 112: Pattern of conferences (A/58/435 and Add.1, A/58/620, A/59/32, A/59/133 and Corr.1, A/59/159 and Add.1, A/59/172 and A/59/418)

1. **Mr. Drofenik** (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/59/32), said that the report included specific recommendations to the General Assembly and directives to the Secretariat. All of the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report, including a draft resolution for consideration by the Fifth Committee, had been adopted by consensus.* The Committee on Conferences further recommended that the issue of the biennialization of the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" should be referred to the Fifth Committee.

2. Section I of the draft resolution approved the revised draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2005, subject to provisions within the resolution, and authorized the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments necessary based on actions or decisions taken during the fifth-ninth session of the General Assembly. Concerns over a scheduling conflict, namely, the overlap between the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme had prompted the Committee on Conferences to recommend a long-term solution for such conflicts, which was set out in paragraph 4 of section I.

3. The overall utilization rate of 77 per cent in 2003 for conference-servicing resources and facilities had improved over the years. He had consulted the chairpersons and secretaries of those bodies which had underutilized their resources in three consecutive years and had urged them to consider changes to their programme of work. He had also noted the need for systematic follow-up of the utilization of conference services by those bodies that consistently underutilized their resources and for fine-tuning the complex methodology for measuring utilization.

4. With regard to the utilization of conference facilities and services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNOB), the continued staff vacancies and high ratio of extrabudgetary funding for conference services were causes of concern. The Committee on Conferences also recommended that a review should be conducted of the current established practice for the provision of services to regional groups. The welcome efforts to reform the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management must be aimed to improving the timely delivery of documentation and the quality of conference services and to meet the needs of the Member States in an efficient and cost-effective way. The ongoing comprehensive study of workload standards and performance measurement should be both qualitative and quantitative and should be conducted from a full-system perspective.

5. With regard to the various options concerning summary records, the Secretary-General was requested to present a number of pilot projects and their related practical and financial implications to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. In the draft resolution, the Assembly would also request the Secretary-General to further develop the functions of the Electronic Meetings Planning and Resource Allocation System (e-Meets) and the electronic documentation management concept (e-Doc) and to consider the use of printing on demand for publications.

6. In the discussion of documentation and publication-related matters, familiar concerns had been raised about the equality of the six official languages, delayed and late issuance and distribution of documentation, partial compliance with page limits and late submission of manuscripts for processing. However, the slotting system had produced initial positive effects and could increase accountability within the Secretariat. The partial lapses in the timely provision of documentation to the Fifth Committee, for example, should not discourage efforts to further refine the system. That, combined with stricter compliance with page limits and submission guidelines, the application of limits and guidelines to intergovernmental reports, and restraint by Member States in circulating communications could further contribute to the solution.

7. The draft resolution noted the progress that had been achieved thus far across duty stations in integrating information technology into management and documentation-processing systems and the global

* The decision to recommend the draft resolution for adoption by the General Assembly through the Fifth Committee had been made with the hope that consideration of the item would thereby be facilitated.

approach to sharing standards, good practices and technological achievements among the conference services at all duty stations and requested the Secretary-General to ensure the compatibility of technologies used in all duty stations and to ensure that they were user-friendly for all official languages. It also recognized the possible benefit of exchanging language staff among duty stations and requested the Secretary-General to report on the conditions of such exchange for the consideration of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

8. **Mr. Chen** Jian (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the Secretary-General's reports on the pattern of conferences (A/59/159 and Add.1) and the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172), said that he foresaw the possibility of submitting a single consolidated report to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, which would cover both pattern of conferences and reform issues.

9. Significant progress had been made since the introduction of reform measures two years previously. The transition from conference servicing to conference management was well under way, further integration was being pursued at all levels, information technology strategies had been geared towards the priorities of the reform and a clearer focus on tangible results had emerged. However, the reform of the Department was a process of gradual adjustment and much remained to be done to make substantial headway in a more balanced and sustainable manner.

10. For many years, crisis had been a fact of life within the Department and crisis management was its primary modus operandi. Accordingly, the problems currently facing the Department could be solved only by bringing the chaos under control through proactive conference management. However, as a servicing department whose operations were largely influenced by those of the other departments of the Secretariat, Member States and intergovernmental bodies, there was a limit to what the Department could do alone. Just as it was only part of the problem, it could at best be only part of the solution. The success of its efforts depended, to a large extent, on joining efforts with the rest of the Secretariat and with Member States.

11. In that regard, the Fifth Committee had an important role to play, in both legislative and practical terms, in creating the necessary conditions for the Secretariat to achieve results. In particular, clearer encouragement was needed for the efforts of the Secretariat to consolidate reports, enforce the 20-page limit for reports not within its purview, ensure respect for the drafting guidelines issued in the context of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, and encourage Member States to exercise restraint in their communications. With regard to the availability of documentation, there should be better interaction with meetings planning services in order to coordinate the programmes of work of the various intergovernmental bodies with documentation processing needs. The Assembly's continued support and guidance were needed for the Department's efforts at integrated global management and on the direction to go in handling the question of summary records. The Assembly's endorsement was also sought for pursuing the study on workload standards and performance measurement from a full-system perspective.

12. **Mr. Ouédraogo** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "From the Optical Disk System to the Official Documents System (ODS): status of implementation and evaluation" (A/58/435), said that the original Optical Disk System had been introduced following a series of Joint Inspection Unit reports in 1986, 1987 and 1989, and had become operational in both Geneva and New York in the biennium 1991-1992. Since then, it had been extended to other duty stations and had expanded so much that it had been succeeded by the current ODS in 1999, with navigation and search facilities no longer restricted to English and French, but available instead in the six official languages of the United Nations.

13. Most of the report's eight recommendations were addressed to the Secretary-General, with the remainder addressed to the General Assembly. The Secretary-General had accepted all of the recommendations addressed to him and the general progress made towards implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit was described in the annexes to the report.

14. With regard to policy issues, recommendation 1 proposed that the Assembly should reaffirm the need for implementation of ODS to cover the entire organization, including all the regional commissions and UNON. Recommendation 2 proposed that the Secretary-General should remind all units responsible

for posting documents on ODS of the need to abide strictly by the simultaneous distribution rule established by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/117 B and subsequent resolutions. Recommendation 3 concerned the possible revision of the policy of fee-for-service access to ODS, though the General Assembly had since forestalled that recommendation by approving the financial provisions made in the programme budget for 2004-2005.

15. With regard to management issues, recommendation 4, which was supported by the Advisory Committee, proposed that the Secretary-General should report to Member States on the progress and cost of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library project to digitize all documents published between 1946 and 1992 in order to preserve the Organization's "institutional memory". Recommendation 5 proposed that the Secretary-General should review the overall process of the management of ODS, including whether the inputting of documents should revert to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management so as to keep the global chain of document management intact. Recommendation 6 proposed that, in order to widen awareness of ODS and to increase its multilingual content, more hyperlinks should be placed on the web sites of all departments, regional commissions and organizations for which relevant documents were posted on ODS. Recommendation 7 proposed that the Secretary-General should take steps to improve user satisfaction and the user-friendliness of ODS, and recommendation 8 proposed that he should include in the Organization's information and communication technology strategy all relevant aspects of the implementation of ODS in offices away from Headquarters and ensure that future development of the System was part of a coherent and coordinated approach to electronic document management at the United Nations.

16. **Ms. Mabutas** (Director of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management), introducing the related report of the Secretary-General (A/58/435/Add.1), said that the Secretariat had responded positively to the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit. It was committed to providing the regional commissions and other offices away from Headquarters with full access to the system and had made further development of ODS an integral part of the Organization's information and communication technology strategy.

17. Good progress had been made in implementing the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit. In connection with recommendation 1, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UNON now had the capacity to input documents into the system. In connection with recommendation 3, links had been established so that the Google search engine could provide access to ODS documents via the Organization's public web site. With regard to free public access, additional equipment had been installed, configured and tested to increase the capacity of ODS and a new web interface would provide open access to public documents on ODS without the need for a user ID or password. The target date for implementation of those improvements was the end of 2004.

18. **Ms. Azarias** (Director of the Internal Audit Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General regarding the Office of Internal Oversight Services report on the integration of global management of conference services (A/59/133 and Corr.1), said that, in response to a request for consulting services from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Office had held workshops in the Organization's four duty stations to identify obstacles to full integration of conference services. All of the recommendations contained in the report had been developed jointly with the Department.

19. Diverse management practices and policies had been developed in the four duty stations because there had been no consistent determination of where responsibility for conference services resided. To overcome that problem, the Office had proposed a collaborative model in which policies and practices would be developed jointly across all four duty stations. As a first step towards implementing the model, nine task forces were to be formed covering all relevant areas. Five high-priority task forces would submit reports in 2004 and the remainder would do so in 2005. The final result envisioned was a Department-wide manual of practices and procedures. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had fully endorsed the recommendations in the report and had begun to implement many of them.

20. **Mr. Maycock** (Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related reports of the Advisory Committee on

Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) contained in documents A/59/418 and A/58/620, said that the Advisory Committee's primary concerns regarding the report on pattern of conferences (A/59/418) were the problems encountered with the implementation of the slotting system and the unreliability of raw statistics for analysing the utilization of conference resources. With regard to the vacancy situation, the Advisory Committee felt that greater attention should be paid to succession planning. The impact of information technology tools on the work of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management had been uneven and more needed to be done to ensure that the use of new technology led to efficiency gains and reflected the needs and experience of its users.

21. Greater efforts were also needed to raise the performance and productivity of individual staff members by, inter alia, linking staff training programmes with workload standards and performance measurement.

22. **Mr. Elkhuizen** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro) and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that conference services were instrumental to the success of the Organization's work. Since the resources required in that area represented a substantial share of the regular budget, the European Union placed great value on the principles of effectiveness, efficiency and quality of the services provided.

23. The report of the Committee on Conferences (A/59/32) contained many positive, forward-looking elements, including the consultations held by the Chairman of the Committee with those bodies that consistently underutilized their allocated resources. In addition, the draft resolution annexed to the report would substantially facilitate the work of the Fifth Committee on the issue during the current session of the Assembly.

24. With regard to the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the introduction of e-Meets and the progress made with e-Docs were valuable steps in the right direction. The European Union was looking forward to the completion of the comprehensive study of the integrated global management of conference services and the study on workload standards and performance measurement. It also supported the development of pilot projects designed to bring about more efficient and cost-effective delivery of summary records.

25. One of the main challenges facing the Secretariat was to find a balance between improving the quality of documents and their timely issuance and delivering them in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Significant progress had been made in that regard, in particular through the strict implementation of the slotting system, the electronic transmission of documents and printing on demand, but there was still room for improvement. The negative impact of the late issuance of documents or their non-availability on the functioning of intergovernmental and expert bodies could not be underestimated.

26. Lastly, while the risks associated with the proposed biennialization of the agenda item entitled "Pattern of conferences" seemed minimal, the benefits seemed substantial. The profile of the Committee on Conferences would be enhanced and its annual sessions would be maintained. In addition, the workload of the Fifth Committee would be lessened and the Secretariat would have more time to analyse and assess new and emerging trends.

27. **Mr. Al-Ansari** (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the general increase in the utilization of conference services at the different duty stations, but expressed regret at the continued decrease in the number of meetings held by regional groups that were provided with interpretation. The Group of 77 and China endorsed the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences aimed at improving the provision of interpretation services to those meetings.

28. The Group was deeply concerned about the disproportionately high vacancy rates in the translation and interpretation services at UNON. The continued failure to fill those vacancies should be addressed through the implementation of accountability measures to ensure that all duty stations were treated equally. The Secretary-General must take the necessary steps to address current disparities in the level of conference services provided to delegations at non-Headquarters duty stations. Nearly half of the resources allocated to

conference services at UNON, for example, came from extrabudgetary funding. Immediate action should be taken to remedy that situation and to bring the financial arrangements of UNON into line with those of similar duty stations.

29. The late issuance of documentation was another issue of concern to the Group, particularly in view of its negative impact on the legislative process. Author departments were therefore urged to comply with the 10-week rule for the submission of documents and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to redouble its efforts to ensure strict compliance with the six-week rule for their issuance. However, any reduction in the length of reports should not affect their quality or content and should be conducted in a non-selective manner. Timely and easy access to documents in the six official languages was essential to the success of the intergovernmental process. Summary and verbatim records were particularly important tools for preserving institutional memory and the continuous delays in their issuance were a matter of some concern.

30. **Ms. Ebbesen** (United States of America) said that her delegation hoped that Member States would avoid a protracted debate on the draft resolution submitted by the Committee on Conferences. It supported the biennialization of the item in order to promote better working practices in the Fifth Committee while allocating appropriate time to what was an important topic. It endorsed the comments on that subject made by the Secretary-General in his report.

31. Although in most cases the author departments were responsible for the late issuance of documents, her delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that the slotting system had become an obstacle to timely issuance. It also agreed with the Committee on Conferences that the programmes of work of the Main Committees should be better coordinated with documentation-processing needs. But the Main Committees themselves, including the Fifth Committee, needed to do a better job of limiting requests for documentation.

32. Where the problems of summary records were concerned, her delegation supported the request contained in the draft resolution that the Secretary-General should consult bodies with entitlement to summary records with a view to assessing the continued need for such records. The concentration of précis-writing in the English Service would also help to reduce delays in translation. The possibility of replacing summary records with digital records should certainly be explored as a timely and cost-effective alternative.

33. The United States delegation remained concerned about the lack of progress in the Task Force on Workload Standards and Performance Management and, like the Advisory Committee, was not convinced that the Department had made sufficient efforts to raise the performance of individual staff members. Despite the improvements achieved by the Department through the application of information technology, efficiency gains could never be fully realized until appropriate workload standards and performance measurements were implemented. On a more positive note, her delegation welcomed the Department's successful development of the system of integrated global management at the four duty stations and looked forward to reviewing the findings of the nine task forces. It also noted with appreciation the savings resulting from the introduction of printing on demand.

34. **Mr. Iosifov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was following the reform of the Department closely. While it welcomed the initial steps taken in improving the use of information technology, any innovation should be carefully analysed to ensure full-system benefits, taking into account the unique nature of each duty station. In the past, it had cautioned that existing working methods must not be swept away without a reliable alternative and new methods must undergo small-scale testing to ensure that any problems did not cause widespread harm. Its fears had been confirmed by the Advisory Committee, which had described the problems caused by the slotting system. The Secretariat should take action to address the current problems of the late issuance of documents.

35. Extreme care should also be taken in reforming the working methods of the language services. As the Advisory Committee had pointed out, the introduction of new technology had not automatically increased productivity in those services. It should not be assumed that methods tested in other departments could be used in the language services, whose tasks were often not amenable to automation.

36. The quality of translation remained a concern. Documents in Russian, including even Security

Council and General Assembly resolutions, contained inaccuracies, omissions and distortions of meaning. Different documents on a single subject used different terminology. Interpretation from Russian into English, while satisfactory in the Security Council, was often not so in other bodies. Some interpreters surprisingly lacked knowledge of the basic vocabulary of particular committees. The management of the Interpretation Service should remind interpreters of the need to prepare for meetings and to read documents in advance.

37. In the absence of any reliable qualitative or quantitative performance indicators for the language services, Member States' satisfaction remained the only test of quality. The Department should find ways of keeping track of such user satisfaction. One possible solution was to hold the information meetings twice rather than once a year. The results of those meetings should not be wasted. In that connection, the Department's initiative to establish a web site for user feedback on the quality of service and terminology was a welcome step.

38. One of the influences on stable quality of service was the suitability of the working conditions and resources of the language services. The uneven distribution of human and financial resources among the language services was a concern which the Department must address. With regard to the global management of conference services, rigid centralization must be avoided. There must instead be a balanced division of labour among duty stations, with the Department in a coordinating role, ensuring efficient use of potential.

39. The way to make genuine improvements in the quality of conference services was to adopt a balanced, individualized approach to the reform of divisions, while constantly monitoring full-system progress. Obviously ineffective and obsolete working methods and technologies must be replaced in an evolutionary manner and step-by-step with proven and tested new working methods and technologies.

40. **Mr. Kutty** (India) commended the work of the Committee on Conferences, particularly the draft resolution on pattern of conferences it had recommended for adoption by the General Assembly (A/59/32, annex I), which would facilitate the Committee's consideration of the item. The consolidation of reports and reduction in the number of reports originating in the Secretariat were legitimate issues that Member States needed to examine. However, it was also necessary to consider how to deal with reports that were not within the Secretariat's purview. Reiterating his delegation's concern about the late issuance of documentation, he called on the Secretariat to ensure that documents were delivered in a timely fashion by increasing efficiency and accurately projecting the resources required to handle the workload at any given time.

41. With regard to the slotting system, the Department should hold consultations with the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies and author departments with a view to introducing a measure of flexibility. He trusted that the interdepartmental task force would address that issue. Reports pertaining to matters of a time-bound nature should be prioritized so that delegates were able to give them due consideration. The Department should also set aside sufficient capacity to produce reports requested by the Committee at the first and second parts of the resumed session for consideration at the main part of the subsequent session of the General Assembly.

42. Greater use of information technology could lead to efficiency gains in the Department's work. However, it was important to conduct adequate training and testing beforehand so as to avoid the teething problems experienced with the introduction of electronic processing of documentation and other such innovations. Also, as the Advisory Committee had stated, some areas of work, including editing, translation and interpretation, were not readily amenable to automation.

43. There was a need for more predictable provision of conference services to meetings of regional and other major groupings, since the percentage of such meetings provided with conference services had actually gone down. The proposal to produce utilization statistics for meetings of regional groups was illogical, since conference services were provided for such meetings on an as-available basis rather than being earmarked for that purpose.

44. The problems with the delivery of summary records had persisted for too long. His delegation welcomed the options proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172). The relevant provisions of the draft

resolution proposed by the Committee on Conferences could also provide a way forward.

45. **Mr. Elji** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, in order to improve the delivery of conference services, the Secretariat must find a way to ensure the timely issuance of documents while maintaining high standards and respecting the principles of multilingualism. Although significant measures had been taken to that end in the context of the reform process, they had not produced the expected results, primarily as a result of the failure of relevant departments to cooperate and the vulnerability of the Organization's accountability system.

46. Through the regular budget, the General Assembly provided the financial resources necessary to enable the Secretariat to service the conference management needs of Member States. However, in spite of the efforts of Member States to facilitate its work through the revitalization of the working methods of the General Assembly, frequent delays in the issuance of documents continued to be experienced. It was particularly unfortunate that the Secretariat had, on several occasions, failed to justify those delays and had attempted to divert the blame for its shortcomings onto Member States.

47. In order to improve matters, the slotting system must be further developed, since it lacked the needed flexibility and had become an obstacle to the timely issuance of required documents. Moreover, printing on demand, an important element of the reform process designed primarily to reduce paper usage, had been implemented in parallel to traditional printing methods rather than as a replacement, thereby doubling the cost of issuing documents and further delaying the process. He welcomed the introduction of electronic bulletin boards to publicize the times and locations of meetings but suggested that meetings should be listed according to the importance of the legislative mandate of the body concerned. The electronic equipment used in conference rooms should also be updated.

48. The implementation of page limits was a cause for concern, since reducing the length of reports often brought about a decline in their quality. Moreover, requests for supplementary information prolonged the negotiation process and the need to obtain official approval for exceeding prescribed limits further contributed to delays in the issuance of documents. The Secretariat should also provide an explanation for its violations of the rule of simultaneous distribution.

49. On the question of summary records, the Secretary-General's report on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172) did not accurately reflect the Assembly's objectives in that regard, since it had merely requested a cost-benefit study of summary records to be conducted. Furthermore, while the report placed appropriate emphasis on the fact that summary records were an important form of institutional memory, it also made illogical claims regarding their financing, since the Secretariat had not requested additional funding for conference services during the negotiations on the programme budget for the current biennium, and should therefore be able to fulfil its mandate in a satisfactory manner within existing resources.

50. The use of new technologies should be encouraged with a view to improving the efficiency and reliability of conference services. However, their use must not be regarded as an end in itself but rather as a means to enable the Secretariat to fulfil its existing mandate while enhancing the quality and timely delivery of services. Despite its positive attitude towards new technologies, the Administration seemed unable to find a way to use them to solve the problems associated with the drafting of summary records. He recalled that the Committee on Information had recognized that technological infrastructures in the United Nations were based on Latin script, which led to difficulties in processing non-Latin and bidirectional scripts. That situation produced serious imbalances in the treatment of the official languages and further consideration should be given to ways of remedying it.

51. A number of vacancies still remained in the interpretation services at UNON, despite the General Assembly's repeated calls for the expeditious filling of the vacant posts. Decisive measures must be taken to rectify the situation and, in that regard, he enquired about the outcome of the recent competitive examination for Arabic interpreters.

52. Lastly, his delegation took note of the report on the integration of global management of conference services (A/59/133) but requested further information. It also endorsed the recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "From the Optical Disk System to the Official Documents System

(ODS): status of implementation and evaluation" (A/58/435 and Add.1) and the relevant recommendations of ACABQ and enquired whether all documents in ODS would eventually be made available free of charge to the general public.

53. **Mr. Chen** Jian (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management) said that his Department would give full answers to the questions raised at the end of the discussion, but he would comment immediately on the slotting system. There was probably no dispute as to the system's value, but its operation needed to be explained more clearly by the Secretariat. The slotting system was a tool for planning the submission of documents and the Department's capacity to process and issue them. The planning process brought together the three main actors, namely, the submitting department, his own Department, and the intergovernmental body concerned. It allowed the submitting department to know when an item was to be taken up, the Department to assess the processing requirements, and the intergovernmental body to understand the whole pre-issuance procedure. The process thus enhanced accountability within the United Nations system. The statistics already confirmed that the submitting departments now understood the situation better and were submitting more documents under the slotting system.

54. In 2004, the first full year of the system's operation, the three main actors had decided not to entertain "reslotting". There would be no change in slotted dates regardless of the circumstances. The 2004 figures indicated in fact a lower rate of compliance with slotted dates, but that did not mean that the submitting departments were any less aware of the need for timely submission of manuscripts for processing.

55. With regard to the alleged inflexibility of the slotting system, it should be noted that the system was based on the inflexible 10-week rule, which allowed four weeks for processing. That inflexibility carried over in principle into the slotting system, but in practice the Department tried to accommodate the actual needs.

56. Since only 40 per cent of the current workload was "slottable", the Department had to combine the slotted workload with a forecast workload, based on past experience, for the other 60 per cent. It needed to improve its handling of that larger part of the workload. But the slotting system, as the Committee on Conferences had noted, had proved initially successful. It would perform even better in the future. Of course, the Department could never comply fully with the 10-week rule, but the late issuance of documents was usually due to external factors. For example, the submitting departments often had to seek inputs from programmes or agencies or await replies from Governments. That was an area in which improvement would be very helpful.

Agenda item 153: Financing of the United Nations Operation in Burundi (A/59/300 and A/59/412)

57. **Ms. Pollard** (Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the budget for the United Nations Operation in Burundi for the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 (A/59/300), said that the Secretary-General's proposed budget for the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) for the full period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 amounted to $333.2 million, which provided for the phased deployment of 200 military observers, 5,450 military contingent personnel, 120 civilian police, 403 international and 423 national staff, and 172 United Nations Volunteers. The budget also provided for the transfer from the strategic deployment stock of various categories of equipment with a replacement value of $13.6 million. The action to be taken by the General Assembly was set out in paragraph 102 of the report.

58. **Mr. Maycock** (Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's report on the item (A/59/412), said that the Advisory Committee had identified reductions totalling $3.5 million in the Secretary-General's request and had made observations and recommendations on the administration and management of ONUB and on opportunities for further savings.

59. In paragraphs 5 to 7 of its report, the Advisory Committee commented on the results-based budgeting format and described the proposed structure of ONUB. That structure was discussed further in paragraphs 16 to 20, where the Advisory Committee's remarks closely tracked the concerns expressed in its report on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) (A/59/390) with regard to a model structure for current and future missions.

60. The recommendations on posts, contained in paragraph 21 of the report, took account of the Advisory Committee's concerns with regard to structure and were intended to be consistent with its recommendations on other missions.

61. A number of comments on operational costs were set out in paragraphs 22 to 28 of the report. The Advisory Committee was expecting the performance report on ONUB to show savings on travel of staff and rental of premises. It also called for more precision in the methodology for estimating requirements for spare parts and for a review of arrangements for rental of vehicles. With regard to communications and information technology, the Advisory Committee cautioned that, when planning its acquisition of computers and other equipment, ONUB should take into account the actual incumbency situation and pace of mission deployment. It also commented on the need to develop a consistent policy with regard to hospitality expenses.

62. Electoral assistance was dealt with in paragraphs 30 to 31 of the report. The Advisory Committee stressed the importance of starting quick-impact projects at the earliest stages of mission deployment.

63. It concluded by recommending an estimate of $329,714,400 for ONUB for the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005, inclusive of the previously granted commitment authority of $106,334,600 for the period from 1 July to 31 October 2004.

64. **Mr. Postema** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that the European Union had set out its general views on policy in its statement on the financing of peacekeeping operations under agenda items 129 and 155. It now supported the Advisory Committee's comments on ONUB and commended the Secretariat for its use of the results-based budgeting framework for the Operation. It urged the Secretariat to make further use of that framework to improve the indicators for measuring achievement and outputs. The Secretariat was to be commended on the high degree of cooperation between ONUB and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). The question of cooperation between missions in a given region should be explored further.

65. The European Union was concerned about the vacancy rate for national staff of more than 60 per cent and urged the Secretariat to address the problem. It was also concerned about the replication of functions in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and in other ONUB offices.

66. The European Union fully endorsed the Advisory Committee's comments on the number of posts. While recognizing the requirements of the Operation and the need for the Special Representative to have appropriate numbers of personnel, it sought further justification for the number of posts from the Secretariat.

67. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group welcomed the Secretary-General's budget proposal for ONUB, which reflected the resources required for successful implementation of its multidimensional mandate. It was imperative for the Committee to provide a solid foundation for the work of the peacekeeping operation. The Group would consider the Advisory Committee's recommendations further during the informal consultations, when the Secretariat should provide a detailed explanation of the potential impact of any reductions on the work of ONUB.

68. It was to be inferred from paragraph 21 of its report that the Advisory Committee's proposed reductions to the staffing table of ONUB were similar to those proposed for MINUSTAH. However, while both missions were multidimensional, they had very different mandates. The model used by the Secretariat to determine mission structure should therefore be applied flexibly and the Advisory Committee should examine the resource requirements of the two missions on a case-by-case basis. The Group looked forward to further elaboration by the Advisory Committee on the comments contained in paragraphs 16 to 21 of its report and their specific application to ONUB.

69. Most of the staffing adjustments proposed by the Advisory Committee were in the Offices of the Special Representative and the two Deputy Special Representatives. It should be remembered that the Special Representative also chaired the Implementation Monitoring Committee for the Arusha Agreement, and the Group cautioned against any decision that might

weaken the Offices in the crucial early stages of the deployment of ONUB.

70. The Group did not understand the reasoning behind the proposal to downgrade one of the posts of Deputy Special Representative to the D-2 level. The Deputy Special Representative in question would serve both as Resident Coordinator and as Humanitarian Coordinator, as well as overseeing substantive components of the Operation. The tasks assigned to him would have a crucial impact on the fulfilment of the mandate of ONUB. Furthermore, it was estimated that as many as 500,000 refugees might return to Burundi over the next three years, and the Secretary-General had reported that the return and resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees would constitute a major humanitarian challenge. Since those matters also fell within the purview of the Deputy Special Representative, the post should be maintained at the appropriate level to ensure the effective functioning of the Operation.

71. The African Group shared the Advisory Committee's opinion of the importance of undertaking quick-impact projects. The ones identified in the budget proposal would enhance public confidence in and goodwill towards ONUB. It also shared the Advisory Committee's concern about the slow pace of recruitment of national staff; urgent steps should be taken to address that problem.

72. Sustainable peace in Burundi was necessary for long-term stability in the Great Lakes region. The close cooperation between ONUB and MONUC was therefore encouraging and should be continued. In view of the expanded role for MONUC provided for in Security Council resolution 1565 (2004), its resources might soon come under considerable strain. ONUB should therefore be helped to develop further its own capacities.

73. **Mr. Nteturuye** (Burundi) said that ONUB had a crucial role to play in the continuation and completion of the peace process in Burundi. It must be provided with adequate human, financial and logistical resources, taking into account its multidimensional mandate and the conditions on the ground. Those resources must also reflect, to the extent possible, his Government's priorities for the transition period: restoration of security throughout the territory; provision of assistance to returnees and internally displaced persons; and successful implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme, which, together with the political process, would be a decisive factor in the outcome of the peace process. In addition, ONUB would require sufficient resources to support election preparations and to monitor both the electoral campaigns and the voting in the seven elections that were to be held.

74. Burundians were confronted with the harsh realities of poverty. Many citizens had no access to basic social infrastructure, much of which had been destroyed during the conflict. While his Government, aided by donors, bore the primary responsibility for reconstruction and economic recovery, ONUB could facilitate that process by implementing quick-impact projects. Such projects would also help ONUB gain acceptance among the population. His delegation had therefore been surprised to learn that only $1 million had been allocated for that purpose. It was also concerned about the slow pace of recruitment of national staff. Greater use of national staff would contribute to the reduction of unemployment in Burundi and create goodwill towards ONUB, while lowering the mission's costs. Given the subregional dimension of the conflict in Burundi, adequate resources should be provided for the establishment of a permanent dialogue among the Governments of the region and officials in border areas.

75. Concerning the Advisory Committee's recommendations for reductions to the proposed budget for ONUB, the Organization would surely not enhance its image in the region by cutting the mission's resources even before it got off the ground. He therefore urged delegations to approve the budget as proposed by the Secretary-General.

76. **Mr. Shalita** (Rwanda) said that the situation in Burundi was unique and challenging: the country had experienced long periods of civil strife, economic decline and social upheaval; some two thirds of the population lived below the poverty line; there was widespread displacement; and the transition process remained fragile. The task of ONUB was therefore complex and multidimensional, and it was important to ensure that the new mission had sufficient human and financial resources to implement its broad mandate.

77. His delegation welcomed the budget and civilian staffing proposals for ONUB. It recognized that having the right people in the right jobs was critical for the success of the mission and the peace process in

Burundi. In that connection, he noted that in its recommendations on posts, the Advisory Committee had referred to its report on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) (A/59/390). It was not advisable, however, to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to peacekeeping missions. Rather, the structure of each mission should be dictated by its mandate and the conditions on the ground.

78. He noted with concern that the Advisory Committee recommended the abolition or downgrading of several key posts in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Weakening her Office would undermine the capacity of the Special Representative to discharge her many important functions. Accordingly, the posts of Political Affairs Officer (P-4) and Protocol Officer (P-3) should be retained, while the post of Director of the Office should be established at the D-1 level, as proposed by the Secretary-General. As the representative of South Africa had stated, the post of Deputy Special Representative (Humanitarian and Development Coordination) should be maintained at the Assistant Secretary-General level, taking into account the post holder's responsibilities in the crucial areas of human rights, child protection, gender and HIV/AIDS. Public information was an important and sensitive aspect of post-conflict peace-building. The Communications and Public Information Office should therefore be headed at the D-1 level, while the post of Spokesperson should be retained.

79. His delegation concurred with the Advisory Committee that quick-impact projects should be implemented in the early stages of the mission. The projects identified in the proposed budget would help build public confidence in ONUB. The 64.5 per cent vacancy rate for national staff was a cause for concern. While cooperation between ONUB and MONUC was welcome, it was important for ONUB to develop its own capacity, especially since MONUC now had an expanded role and would fully utilize its own resources.

80. Lastly, his delegation wished to underscore the importance of the success of ONUB to peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region. The mission had a critical role to play and should therefore be given the resources it needed to discharge its mandate effectively.

81. **Mr. Mumbey-Wafula** (Uganda) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group and by the representatives of Burundi and Rwanda. Uganda had been deeply affected by the conflict in the Great Lakes region and was closely involved in the efforts to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace. His delegation broadly supported the proposed budget and staffing requirements for ONUB. The Secretary-General's proposal to establish the post of Deputy Special Representative (Humanitarian and Development Coordination) at the Assistant Secretary-General level was entirely appropriate given the realities of the situation on the ground. It was not clear to him, however, what provision had been made for the personal protection of the parties in the peace process for Burundi.

82. **Mr. Ng'ongolo** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group and by the representatives of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's budget proposal for ONUB, which reflected his clear understanding of the unique situation in Burundi. It was grateful to Member States that had met their financial obligations in respect of the mission and urged other Member States to do likewise. His Government would continue to contribute to efforts to bring peace to Burundi, including by establishing close cooperation with ONUB.

83. The United Republic of Tanzania shared a land border with Burundi and had long been a haven for refugees from that country. His delegation therefore noted with satisfaction the progress achieved in the political process in Burundi, which had led to the voluntary repatriation of more than 65,000 Burundian refugees in 2004. However, approximately 777,000 refugees remained in the United Republic of Tanzania, placing a tremendous strain on the already impoverished host communities. His delegation therefore attached great importance to ONUB and was ready to support any proposal that would enable the mission to implement its mandate effectively and expeditiously.

84. **Ms. Samayoa-Recarl** (Guatemala) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement

made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group.

85. **Mr. Fiji** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group. It also shared the concerns expressed by the representative of Burundi. It supported the Secretary-General's budget proposal for ONUB. The Advisory Committee's recommendations for the application of a model structure for peacekeeping missions would require careful analysis. The Committee could revert to the matter at the second part of the resumed fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly when it considered cross-cutting issues in the operational aspects of peacekeeping. In the meantime, it should focus on ensuring that ONUB had sufficient resources to discharge its mandate.

86. **Mr. Renault** (Brazil) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group.

87. **Ms. Pollard** (Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division) said that her office would give a detailed account of the reasons for the high vacancy rate for national staff in ONUB during the informal consultations. It would also explain the justification for the posts in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the likely impact on the mission should the Committee endorse the recommendations of ACABQ. Personal protection for the parties in the peace process was being provided under a bilateral arrangement. Accordingly, no resources had been allocated for that purpose.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

United Nations A/C.5/59/SR.8

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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 8th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. MacKay ..... (New Zealand)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Kuznetsov

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Agenda item 112: Pattern of conferences (*continued*)

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04-55297 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 112: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/58/435 and Add.1 and A/58/620; A/59/32, A/59/133 and Corr.1, A/59/159 and Add.1, A/59/172 and A/59/418)

1. **Mr. Olago Owuor** (Kenya), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the Group wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China at the Committee's previous meeting. It noted with appreciation that there had been steady progress and improvement in the utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) since the establishment of a permanent interpretation service in 2001. However, greater effort was needed to market those facilities to a wider clientele. It noted in that connection the marketing campaign being conducted to increase utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). In accordance with the headquarters rule, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) should hold all their meetings and events at UNON. The Secretary-General's commendable efforts to increase utilization of the conference centre at ECA should be pursued. In addition, the centre should establish and develop linkages with other United Nations conference centres and bodies and introduce an integrated conference management system and other modern technologies for more efficient delivery of services.

2. The Group noted with concern the high vacancy rates in the translation and interpretation services in Nairobi, which stood at 25 and 26.3 per cent respectively, compared with only 7.79 and 3.65 per cent at the United Nations Office at Geneva. It also noted the chronic difficulty in staffing the UNON Arabic Interpretation Unit. A long-term strategy should be developed to address the persistent problem of vacancies in Nairobi, which had not received the attention it deserved. The Group trusted that the Secretary-General would present such a proposal at the current session.

3. With regard to the calendar of conferences and meetings, the Group noted the overlap in April 2005 between the sessions of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat and the Commission on Sustainable Development. Such overlaps should be avoided in future as they presented difficulties for small delegations from developing countries. The Group noted with concern that some requests for provision of interpretation services to regional and other major groupings of Member States had not been met, notwithstanding the General Assembly's decision to include all necessary resources for that purpose in the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. It also regretted that no interpretation services had been provided for the portion of the 459th meeting of the Committee on Conferences conducted via videoconference, in which representatives of the conference-servicing units at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna had participated. As a result, some delegations had been unable to follow the deliberations.

4. The Group expected the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) to yield high-quality, cost-effective performance and improvements in efficiency and productivity. It welcomed the development of integrated global management of conference services and the active participation of UNON in that process. It also appreciated the efforts made to include UNON in the sharing of standards, good practices and technological advances with other duty stations, although it would like to see a more integrated approach in that area.

5. **Ms. Chen** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, emphasized the three delegations' strong support for the continued reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. They noted the efforts made in the area of results-based management and the progress achieved towards greater cost-effectiveness and efficiency and the establishment of an integrated global management system. The adoption of a collaborative planning approach among duty stations, while welcome, did not diminish the overall authority of the Under-Secretary-General, who remained accountable for all relevant resources. The integration of information technology in the workplace was not proceeding as rapidly as had been forecast. In that connection, the three delegations looked forward to the early completion of the transition to electronic workflow in all duty stations, which would require concrete targets and strong leadership and vision from the Department's management. Quantitative measures of productivity, efficiency and

cost-effectiveness were essential management tools. The lack of progress in developing means to measure productivity and efficiency was therefore puzzling. Lastly, the three delegations wished to propose the biennialization of the item on pattern of conferences, which, though important, did not require annual treatment.

6. **Mr. Berti Oliva** (Cuba) said that the proper conduct of the intergovernmental legislative process depended heavily on effective and efficient conference services and the goal of reforming the Department should be to provide such services.

7. While it acknowledged the efforts of the Department to fulfil its role of providing effective support for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172) had made certain value judgements in connection with the sensitive and sometimes controversial discussions on the revitalization of the General Assembly. It regarded the report's discussion of issues such as "reform of the working methods of the Main Committees" as inappropriate, as they were a matter for the Member States alone.

8. His delegation hoped that the Electronic Meetings Planning and Resource Allocation System (e-Meets) would improve the Secretariat's ability to respond to requests from Member States. An in-depth analysis of the chronic problem of documentation should be conducted and Member States must retain the right to request whatever reports they deemed necessary to the legislative process and to request that their communications, of whatever length, should be distributed as official documents. While it could not agree to decisions which, out of supposed budgetary concerns, violated the rights and prerogatives of Member States, it was prepared to consider any proposals that might improve the provision of documents.

9. Given the crisis experienced by the Fifth Committee at the current session, his delegation questioned the conclusion in paragraph 28 of the report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Department (A/59/172) that there had been "a trend of improvement in the timely issuance of documents". It would also like clarification of the statistics presented in that paragraph. Though it was not opposed to changing the current standard, it wondered why the Secretariat had used the four-week rather than the six-week rule to measure timely issuance during the Assembly's fifty-seventh and fifty-eighth sessions and which bodies had been most affected by delays in the issuance of documents.

10. With regard to printing on demand (PoD) and the possible savings generated, his delegation recalled the unequivocal view of the General Assembly that that method should affect neither the quality of services to Member States nor the number of documents that delegations were able to request. Furthermore, while paragraph 35 of the Secretary-General's report indicated that the tangible benefits included the reduction of 13 staff members, Part I, Section 2, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/58/6, Sect. 2, para. 2.12 (g)) had indicated restructuring of the text-processing area with the abolition of 7 posts and the redeployment of another 19 posts to other priority areas in the Department. He wondered why the figures differed and what basis had been used to calculate savings, particularly in staff costs.

11. He also wished to know the cause and average length of the obvious time lag between the availability of a document in electronic form and its availability in printed form. The Secretariat seemed to be giving precedence to the electronic versions of documents, thus violating the relevant decisions of the General Assembly.

12. **Ms. Kane** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management) expressed gratitude for delegations' support for the Department's efforts. With regard to the slotting system, the aim of introducing any innovation was to serve Member States better. However, given the Department's short experience with the system, there had been some teething problems not only in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management but also in author departments and discipline was required on all sides. It was illogical to blame the slotting system per se for the late issuance of documentation. It allowed greater flexibility than the 10-week rule for the timely submission of documentation, although that rule remained in force and should be adhered to where possible. Documents submitted late could be turned around more quickly, but higher costs were incurred. The purpose of the

slotting system was precisely to avoid the large overruns of the past by ensuring greater predictability.

13. A number of delegations had referred to the report of the Board of Auditors to the Security Council on the financial statements of the United Nations Compensation Commission for the biennium ended 31 December 2003 (S/2004/789). That document had been submitted to the Department on 5 October 2004 for issuance on 11 October 2004, which was a very tight turnaround time. It was one of a series of reports requested from the Board in connection with the investigation of the oil-for-food programme. Owing to the length of those reports and the short issuance deadlines, the Department had been instructed to offset the attachments in the language of submission. For that reason, the annexes to document S/2004/789 had been issued in English only.

14. The provision of interpretation services to regional and other major groupings of Member States had been analysed in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/57/228). The conclusion had been reached that earmarked resources would be required in the programme budget in order to provide those services on a more predictable basis. Currently, those services were provided on an ad hoc basis from within existing resources. The percentage of requests for interpretation met had declined from 98 per cent two years earlier to 90 per cent in the period under review. However, under the current circumstances, 90 per cent could be seen as the norm for New York. Moreover, the number of meetings provided with interpretation had actually increased by 10 per cent each year over the previous three years. In order to ensure uniformity of practice, the Department had established a task force on meetings planning that would review procedures at each duty station and make proposals on ways and means of improving the provision of services.

15. The Department shared delegations' concern about the funding of posts at UNON through a combination of regular budget and extrabudgetary allocations. While all 20 posts in the interpretation service were funded from the regular budget, 35 out of 47 posts in the translation service were extrabudgetary and offered no career prospects. That situation not only made it difficult to attract qualified candidates, but was also unfair, since it created two classes of staff. She understood that UNON intended to address the problem in the next budget cycle. However, conversion of posts would be staggered.

16. The vacancy rate in interpretation would be reduced substantially as new competitive examinations were held. The problem was most acute in the Arabic booth. A competitive examination had already been held and the successful candidates would be interviewed shortly. The Office of Human Resource Management would then begin the recruitment procedure with the interpretation service in Nairobi being given priority. The high vacancy rate in translation was mostly due to the large number of retirements in recent years. While the Department had planned for the succession, including by holding more frequent competitive examinations for translators, the magnitude of the situation was unprecedented. Another factor in the high vacancy rate was mobility, which the Department encouraged.

17. In response to the request made by the General Assembly in section II.B, paragraph 9, of its resolution 58/250, the Department had proposed five options to make the provision of summary records more efficient and cost-effective. Those options were outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172, paras. 59-63). At the substantive session of the Committee on Conferences in September 2004, Member States had expressed interest in the option of concentrating précis-writing in the English Translation Service, which could be combined with the option of restricting the length of summary records. In addition, the option of replacing summary records with digital recordings had found support among some delegations in both the Committee on Conferences and the Fifth Committee. If Member States so requested, the Secretariat would study the practical and financial implications of the first option and present a pilot project to the Assembly at its sixtieth session. It would also examine the possibility of setting a time frame for the publication of summary records.

18. The utility of summary records had been the subject of considerable debate. However, the issue was for Member States themselves to decide. Likewise, the intergovernmental bodies entitled to summary records must themselves determine whether they wished to renounce their entitlements. While the drafting of summary records in the original language was generally completed within a few days of the meeting,

translation into the other five official languages lagged owing to the pressure of higher priority parliamentary documentation. In order to issue summary records in a more timely fashion, it would be necessary to reinforce the staffing of the translation services or provide additional resources for contractual translation of summary records, particularly in the light of the recent increase in the number of meetings, which had led to a commensurate rise in the requirement for summary records, without a corresponding increase in resources. Alternatively, the General Assembly might wish to conduct a thorough cost-benefit study of summary records and review the list of bodies entitled to them. Pending the completion of such a study, the Department had decided not to request any special provision for summary records in the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 but to do its best to expedite their delivery within existing resources.

19. The informational meetings to brief Member States on the terminology used and to consult with them on the improvement of the language services would be held twice a year for each language rather than once a year. The Department also planned to set up a web site to receive comments on an ongoing basis. Pending the establishment of the web site, it would appreciate receiving feedback from delegations via e-Meets. Meeting-related information was currently posted on electronic bulletin boards according to the chronological order in which meetings would take place. When more than one meeting was scheduled to take place at the same time, the information was posted according to the hierarchical order of the bodies concerned. That arrangement had been deemed the most practical. However, if Member States so requested, the Department would be willing to adopt hierarchical order as the first criterion, following the practice of the Journal of the United Nations. Lastly, there were different levels of access to the Official Documents System (ODS). When free, public access to ODS was implemented, only documents for general distribution would be freely available. Access to conference room papers, for example, would require a password.

20. **Ms. Goicoches** (Cuba), while welcoming the information provided by the Assistant Secretary-General, said that her delegation's questions had not been answered and recalled its position that questions posed in a formal meeting of the Committee must be answered at a formal meeting.

21. **Mr. Elji** (Syrian Arab Republic) referred to the issuance of an addendum to a document in English only, even though addendums were considered to be part of an official document, and reiterated that official documents must be issued in all official languages. With regard to summary records, he had noted the absence of a request for resources to be allocated for that purpose in the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. However, in its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to take action to ensure the timely issuance of summary records and the mandates for that purpose were contained in the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 and the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. In his view, the budget must therefore make provision for timely issuance of summary records. He looked forward to receiving a written response to his questions.

22. **Mr. Olago Owuor** (Kenya) said that his delegation would like a written transcript of the Assistant Secretary-General's responses.

23. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria) echoed the request of the representative of Kenya for a transcript of the Assistant Secretary-General's responses and wondered why, if there had been an increase in the demand for summary records, that increase had not been reflected in the programme budget.

24. **The Chairman** said that a transcript would be provided as requested. He would take up with the Bureau the matter of scheduling a further meeting to provide the information requested by delegations.

25. **Ms. Kane** (Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management) said that although the number of bodies entitled to summary records had not increased, they held more frequent meetings and therefore required more summary records. The Department had not requested additional resources because the matter had already been taken up in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289). At that time, the Department had suggested to the General Assembly that a cost-benefit analysis of providing summary records should be performed. Pending its outcome, the Department had operated, and would continue to operate, within the parameters of the current budget.

26. As an initial response to the questions of the representative of Cuba, she said that the six-week rule for the submission of documents remained in force, but that the Department had adopted a four-week rule as a strictly temporary internal measure which would be re-examined in the light of experience. The Department would provide more complete information when the Committee allocated more meeting time to the matter.

27. **Mr. Ouédraogo** (Joint Inspection Unit) said that paragraph 37 of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, entitled "From the Optical Disk System to the Official Documents System (ODS): status of implementation and evaluation" (A/58/435), contained a graph describing the seven levels of access to ODS. Levels 1 to 4 allowed access to derestricted documents, documents for general distribution, documents in limited copies and provisional documents. Since public access would extend only up to level 4, users needing access to certain documents, such as conference room papers, which were found in level 5, would encounter difficulties. For that reason, recommendation 7 (d) of the report had proposed requesting the Secretary-General to review access policy for those documents, particularly those connected with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Paragraph 36 of the report had pointed out that even if the General Assembly endorsed free access, registration would still be required for some users, owing to the fact that ODS was not only a repository of public documents but also had in storage restricted documents access to which would continue to be password-protected.

28. **Mr. Olago Owuor** (Kenya) said that he appreciated the efforts of the Bureau to leave more meeting time for the agenda item under discussion and that he would appreciate an answer to his earlier question on how the April 2005 scheduling conflict between the meetings of UN-Habitat and the Commission on Sustainable Development would be resolved.

29. **Mr. Elji** (Syrian Arab Republic) welcomed the clarification provided by the representative of the Joint Inspection Unit. For its part, the Secretariat should provide full details of the arrangements for access to ODS in the event that free access was established and the classification of documents in the System was reviewed.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.

United Nations A/C.5/59/SR.9

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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 9th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 15 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MacKay ..... (New Zealand)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Kuznetsov

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04-55309 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 108: Programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (*continued*)

Estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council (*continued*) (A/C.5/59/L.3)

Draft resolution A/C.5/59/L.3

1. **Mr. Sach** (Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that an earlier version of paragraph 3 of the draft resolution, which had been discussed in the informal consultations, might have led to delays and restricted the Secretariat in its efforts to comply with the request contained in the paragraph. The Secretariat always tried to follow as closely as possible the format of peacekeeping operations. Given the necessary flexibility, the application of the new version of paragraph 3 should not cause the Secretariat any difficulties.

2. *Draft resolution A/C.5/59/L.3 was adopted.*

Agenda item 119: Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B and 54/244 (*continued*)

3. **Mr. Al-Ansari** (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) made a big contribution to the effective implementation of the Organization's programmes and legislative mandates. It had secured major savings in the resources allocated and deserved commendation for its efforts to further improve its work, in line with the recommendations of the General Assembly.

4. Oversight was both an external and an internal service, whose effectiveness depended on cooperation between internal and external bodies. Cooperation between OIOS, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the Board of Auditors should therefore be improved with a view to avoiding duplication and developing complementarity in their work. The Group of 77 and China would welcome information from the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services about the steps that had been taken to establish such cooperation and how effective they had been.

5. The approval of changes in and continuation of legislative mandates was the exclusive prerogative of intergovernmental bodies and OIOS should not make any proposals to the General Assembly in that regard. Where operational independence was concerned, the movement and promotion of the personnel of internal oversight bodies must comply with the Charter, the relevant resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, the Staff Regulations, and the rules of the organizations of the system. The Under-Secretary-General might explain to the Committee the degree to which those provisions had been applied and the position with regard to equitable geographical representation in OIOS.

6. The Group of 77 and China cautioned against creating an inflated bureaucracy. Indeed, OIOS should present an example of leanness and efficiency. They stressed the importance of paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 54/244 and the need for its full implementation and drew attention to the request to the Secretary-General contained in paragraph 5 of the resolution, which had not been complied with to the extent envisaged in the resolution.

7. **Mr. Kramer** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that effective and independent oversight was fundamental to the sound governance of the United Nations. The work of OIOS underpinned the efforts to secure the accountability, diligence and integrity which inspired confidence in and respect for institutions. OIOS had served the Organization well, but the key to real impact lay in the implementation of recommendations, where there was room for improvement. The independence of OIOS was vital and proposals for its further strengthening would be welcome. The ongoing nature of internal oversight should be recognized so that there would be no need for automatic review of the OIOS mandate in the future.

8. **Mr. Elji** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation attached great importance to the work of OIOS, having actively participated in the drafting of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B, by which the Office had been established, and in the review of the work of OIOS undertaken at the Assembly's fifty-fourth session. Its interest in the item stemmed from its desire to optimize the Organization's internal and external oversight functions and to enhance the monitoring and evaluation of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations. Concern

had been expressed about the Office's tendency to exceed its mandate and authority and to interfere in core functions of the legislative bodies. In its resolution 54/244, the Assembly had therefore sought to clarify the role of OIOS and to render its work more transparent. His delegation was grateful to the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services for his efforts to ensure that OIOS adhered strictly to its mandate. The Office now provided valuable services in the areas of audit, investigation and evaluation and made an important contribution to efforts to address abuses of authority, duplication of work and waste. However, there remained room for improvement, despite the progress made.

9. The General Assembly must be more proactive in its consideration of OIOS reports. In many cases, rather than take action on those reports, the Assembly merely took note of them. In other cases, it was unable even to agree on a course of action because of conflicting opinions among delegations about the effectiveness of the reports and the extent to which they related to the Office's mandate. Without guidance from the Assembly, OIOS had been unable to improve its working methods or gauge the value of its recommendations. The Office's reports must be submitted directly to the Assembly. Currently, they were first transmitted to the Secretariat, which was able to accept or reject the recommendations of OIOS before the Assembly had an opportunity to consider them.

10. His delegation wished to see greater emphasis on the investigation and monitoring functions of OIOS. Currently, there was an excessive focus on audit, creating the potential for overlapping with the work of the Board of Auditors. Also, the lack of a general policy for the conduct of the Office's work had led it to develop its own special procedures, which still needed to be evaluated by the General Assembly. A number of administrative departments, including the Office of Human Resources Management, were subject to OIOS oversight, while at the same time being responsible for allocating resources to the Office and recruiting its staff. Although his delegation had confidence in the departments concerned, there remained a risk of conflicts of interest. The issue of the geographical distribution of OIOS staff also required attention. Lastly, OIOS must familiarize itself with the concerns of Member States, as expressed in the resolutions they adopted and in the course of their deliberations in the General Assembly, including weaknesses in the administration of justice, lack of accountability in the Secretariat and late issuance of documentation. He was convinced that, if the Office made the necessary changes, it could contribute more fully to ensuring the efficient and effective implementation of the Organization's legislative and programmatic mandates.

Agenda item 136: Financing of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (A/59/286 and A/59/417)

11. **Ms. Pollard** (Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the revised budget for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) for the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 (A/59/286), said that the revised budget of $291,603,600 represented an increase of about 48 per cent on the amount that had already been appropriated by the General Assembly in its resolution 58/308 of 18 June 2004. The increase was due to the more gradual reduction of military and civilian personnel. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly were set out in paragraph 25 of the report.

12. **Mr. Saha** (Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's report on the proposed revised budget (A/59/417), said that the Advisory Committee recommended approval of the total amount requested. The revised estimates corresponded to the revised drawdown plan that had been approved by the Security Council, which envisaged a more gradual reduction in the military and police strength of UNAMSIL.

13. Information on performance in the current period was provided in Part II of the report, where the Advisory Committee commended the Mission on its well-managed cash position and called upon Headquarters to replicate its good practices in other missions. Paragraphs 13 and 14 of the report contained information on activities related to liquidation, and paragraphs 16 to 20 on the drawdown of military, police and civilian personnel. In paragraph 19, the Advisory Committee called upon the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to assign greater priority to ensuring that adequate numbers of experienced staff were available to carry out winding up activities efficiently and effectively.

14. With regard to operational costs, the Advisory Committee was of the opinion that the training

programmes offered should be related to the operational needs of the downsized Mission, although training programmes for strengthening the capacity of national staff might be planned and executed at all stages of a mission, especially in the downsizing phase. Paragraphs 26 to 32 reviewed the cooperation between UNAMSIL and other peacekeeping operations and United Nations programmes and entities in the region, and emphasized that the exit strategy should be smooth and, to that end, should be coordinated by UNAMSIL. In paragraph 35, the Advisory Committee recommended that consideration should be given to extending the funding for quick-impact projects beyond the initial stages of missions.

15. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that in earlier statements on the item the Group had drawn attention to the need for the drawdown strategy for UNAMSIL to be handled in such a way as to develop the necessary national capacities and had urged the Secretariat to ensure that the reduction of troop strength was accompanied by the achievement of a number of critical benchmarks. UNAMSIL had suffered the tragic loss of 24 personnel, including 14 members of the Pakistani contingent, and the Group extended its deepest sympathy to the families of the deceased.

16. The need to adjust the drawdown timetable had arisen because of developments on the ground, and the adjusted timetable was on track. In its resolution 1562 (2004), the Security Council had welcomed the adjustment. The Group hoped that the gradual drawdown plans would take full account of the security situation on the ground.

17. The African Group endorsed the Secretary-General's revised budget estimates and joined the Advisory Committee in commending the Mission for its cash-management performance. It noted the comments made in paragraph 13 of the Advisory Committee's report and welcomed the initiative taken by UNAMSIL to review its asset write-off and disposal process, which had led to the establishment of an Assets Disposal Group and an Asset Disposal and Environmental Protection Unit. That initiative had been incorporated into the standard guidelines that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations applied in all missions.

18. The reasons for the departure of a significant number of well-trained UNAMSIL personnel to other missions must be explored and measures taken to retain such personnel, who had an important role to play in the critical downsizing phase. The Secretary-General should take steps to guarantee such personnel posts in other missions at the end of the liquidation period.

19. As noted in paragraph 31 of the Advisory Committee's report, multidimensional partnerships were needed for recovery and sustainable development in Sierra Leone. The African Group would like to know what impact the second pillar had had in UNAMSIL and why it had disappeared from the current structure. It would also welcome an explanation of the rationale for the activities now placed under the aegis of the remaining Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and their implications for the exit strategy. Lastly, it would be useful to know which of the lessons learned could be replicated in other missions.

20. The commendable cooperation between UNAMSIL and other United Nations peacekeeping missions in the subregion must be maintained during the downsizing period, as UNAMSIL continued to be a flagship operation that did excellent work.

21. **Mr. Postema** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that the European Union's general policy on the financing of peacekeeping operations had been outlined in the statement made by his delegation at the Committee's 4th meeting, on Thursday, 7 October 2004, under agenda items 129 and 155. The European Union supported the Advisory Committee's comments on the revised budget for UNAMSIL. It noted with concern the erosion of experienced staff away from UNAMSIL to other missions in the region. It attached great importance to a well-planned, well-executed exit strategy, for which competent and experienced staff were required. It therefore wished to urge the Secretariat to ensure that adequate numbers of experienced staff were available to carry out winding up activities. Lastly, it would welcome any cooperation between UNAMSIL and the other two United Nations missions in West Africa.

22. **Mr. Mutiso** (Chief of the Finance Management and Support Service in the Department of

Peacekeeping Operations), responding to the questions raised by the representative of Nigeria, said that lessons had been learned with regard to the duties of the second Deputy Special Representative. Under the new structure for the remainder of the Mission, he was in charge of humanitarian assistance, coordination and development. The UNAMSIL example was being replicated in the missions in Burundi and Côte d'Ivoire, and the lessons learned were being compiled by the Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, which was to issue a report on the subject. The second pillar was indeed still operational in UNAMSIL.

23. On the question of the departure of trained personnel, it was inevitable that UNAMSIL would be called upon to help the newer missions in the region. The UNAMSIL drawdown arrangements were designed to ensure that core staff remained and additional personnel would be recruited to fill any gaps.

24. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria) said that she could not understand how departures could be beneficial if new personnel had to be recruited. Existing staff members should simply be retained in UNAMSIL. She would take the matter up again in the informal consultations.

25. **Mr. Abbas** (Pakistan), referring to the loss of 14 members of the Pakistani contingent in UNAMSIL, asked what steps the Department of Peacekeeping Operations was taking to improve the security of personnel and what were the findings of the investigation of the incident.

26. **The Chairman** said that the Department would provide further information in the informal consultations. He was sure that he was speaking on behalf of the entire Committee in expressing condolences to the delegation of Pakistan.

Agenda item 154: Financing of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (A/59/289 and A/59/419 and Corr.1)

27. **Ms. Pollard** (Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the budget for the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire for the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 (A/59/289), recalled that the Security Council, in its resolution 1528 (2004), had established the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) for an initial period of 12 months from 4 April 2004. The General Assembly, in its resolution 58/310, had appropriated $200.6 million for the maintenance of the mission for the period from 1 July to 31 December 2004. The budget for the mission amounted to $384.4 million. That would provide for the deployment of 200 military observers, 6,040 military contingent personnel, 350 civilian police, 387 international and 405 national staff, and 215 United Nations Volunteers. The budget included an amount of $12.8 million for the replenishment of items transferred to the mission from the strategic deployment stocks. The action to be taken by the General Assembly, namely, appropriation of $183.7 million in addition to the $200.6 million already appropriated under resolution 58/310, was outlined in paragraph 97 of the report.

28. **Mr. Saha** (Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/59/419 and Corr.1), said that the recommendations contained in the report would entail a reduction of $5.9 million in the proposed budget for UNOCI for the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005. With regard to the mandate and planned results, the Advisory Committee pointed out that the concept of the integrated mission and the coordination role did not seem fully developed in the budget document, despite the fact that the Operation had had, in effect, six months of experience in implementing that structure.

29. The Advisory Committee commended the Operation for the substantial progress it had made in the emplacement of military contingent personnel and military observers. There had been delays, however, in the deployment of the aviation transport unit. The Advisory Committee therefore recommended that the estimate for military contingents should be reduced by $849,200. It also stressed the need for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to deal with the difficulties experienced in finding French-speaking candidates for civilian police.

30. The structure of the mission was discussed in paragraphs 23 to 28 of the report. A number of the Advisory Committee's previous recommendations concerning streamlining had been taken into account in the preparation of the revised budget for UNOCI. However, some of its concerns had not been fully addressed, in particular with regard to the need to establish clear lines of authority and to avoid fragmentation and grade inflation. In paragraph 28, it cautioned against the tendency to replicate functions of

the mission itself in the Offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Special Representatives. The Advisory Committee's recommendations on posts, in paragraphs 29 to 31, reflected its concerns with regard to the structure of the mission and were consistent with its recommendations on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB). With respect to operational costs, it called for the coordination of training in all three missions in the region and made a number of recommendations aimed at reducing expenditure for consultants and official travel.

31. In paragraph 40, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should appropriate an amount of $374.5 million gross for the maintenance of UNOCI for the period, in addition to the amount of $200.6 million already appropriated under Assembly resolution 58/310.

32. **Mr. Obame** (Gabon), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the Group supported the proposed budget for UNOCI. It welcomed the quality of the results-based frameworks used in the budget document and noted with satisfaction that the various components and expected accomplishments corresponded to the mandate of the Operation, as contained in Security Council resolution 1528 (2004). The cooperation between the three United Nations missions in West Africa was also most welcome, and the Group looked forward to the issuance of the report on inter-mission cooperation currently under preparation.

33. The successful implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme was a prerequisite for the restoration of peace in Côte d'Ivoire. The Group was therefore concerned that there remained funding difficulties for the reintegration phase. The World Bank, which was to have provided a loan to cover most of the costs of that phase, had suspended disbursements to Côte d'Ivoire owing to non-payment of its debt obligations, as required under the Bank's conditions for the payment of loans.

34. With regard to the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, which would entail a reduction of $5.9 million in the budget for UNOCI, the Group noted, in particular, the recommendation that the post of Deputy Special Representative for Humanitarian Coordination, Recovery and Reconstruction should be approved at the D-2 level, rather than at the Assistant Secretary-General level as proposed in the budget document. It wished to emphasize that the functions assigned to the Deputy Special Representative were of vital importance for the implementation of the mission's mandate and that the level of responsibility of the post fully justified the Secretary-General's proposal. There was a need to establish a balance between the post and that of Deputy Special Representative for Operations and Rule of Law. The approval of both posts at the Assistant Secretary-General level would send a strong signal about the importance of development and humanitarian assistance in conflict resolution.

35. Côte d'Ivoire faced enormous challenges. There were approximately 500,000 displaced persons and 69,000 refugees, while the economy and much of the country's infrastructure had been severely affected by the conflict. The political situation, moreover, was extremely complex, although there had been progress in the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. The international community must show its solidarity with Côte d'Ivoire by contributing appropriately to the country's reconstruction.

36. **Mr. Postema** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that the European Union concurred with the Advisory Committee's comments on the budget for UNOCI. It wished to commend the Secretariat for using results-based frameworks in the budget document. In line with Security Council resolution 1528 (2004), it would welcome inter-mission cooperation in the region, particularly with respect to administrative and logistical support and training. A regional approach to training, using in-house expertise from the missions, could help reduce expenditure for consultants. The European Union wished to encourage the Secretariat to pursue its efforts to recruit national staff, notwithstanding the difficulties of finding qualified candidates. It fully supported the Advisory Committee's recommendations on posts and shared its concerns about the replication of functions of the mission itself in the Office of the Special Representative. In that connection, it wished to receive further justification from the Secretariat for the staffing proposals.

37. **Ms. Poku** (Ghana) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Gabon on behalf of the African Group. As a neighbour of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana recognized the immense contribution of UNOCI to the restoration of security in that country. The level of the budget proposed for the Operation reflected the complex and varied tasks it was carrying out. She noted with satisfaction the action taken to implement the Advisory Committee's previous recommendations, including the establishment of a timeline for the implementation of the DDR programme, which would commence once a political agreement had been reached between the Ivorian parties concerned. The cooperation among the three United Nations missions in West Africa was most welcome, since pooling of resources would maximize the effectiveness and minimize the overall cost of the missions. She expressed concern that the implementation of the Advisory Committee's recommendations for the abolition or downgrading of certain posts (A/59/419, para. 29) would diminish the Operation's efficiency and place an excessive burden on the incumbents of merged posts. UNOCI was operating in difficult circumstances and required adequate human resources for the discharge of its mandate.

Organization of work

38. **The Chairman** drew attention to the proposed programme of work for the remainder of the session, which would be considered by the Committee at its next meeting, on Monday, 18 October 2004. He noted that, in response to the Committee's request, the Secretariat had expedited the issuance of documentation. As stated in the note by the Secretariat on the status of preparedness of documentation (A/C.5/59/L.1/Rev.1), 18 documents had been issued before the estimated date of issuance, 8 had been issued on the date and 3 had been issued late. In 4 cases, the estimated date of issuance had been put back.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.

United Nations A/C.5/59/SR.10

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Summary record of the 10th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 18 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MacKay ..... (New Zealand)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Kuznetsov

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Agenda item 106: Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors

(a) United Nations

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(d) United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(e) United Nations Institute for Training and Research

(f) Voluntary funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(g) Fund of the United Nations Environment Programme

(h) United Nations Population Fund

(i) United Nations Human Settlements Programme

(j) Fund of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme

(k) United Nations Office for Project Services

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04-55848 (E)

(l) International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991

(m) International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994

(n) Capital master plan

Agenda item 113: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (*continued*)

Other matters

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Organization of work (A/C.5/59/L.1/Rev.1)

1. **Mr. Al-Ansari** (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, proposed that the Committee should adopt the programme of work for the coming week and then reconsider the programme for the remainder of the session at a later date in the light of the status of preparedness of documentation.

2. **Mr. Dutton** (Australia) endorsed the proposal made by the representative of Qatar. However, he felt that the number of meetings on the scale of assessments and the pattern of conferences scheduled for the coming week could be reduced. Owing to the late issuance of relevant documentation, delegations were finding it difficult to prepare thoroughly for upcoming meetings. To facilitate their work, greater certainty was needed regarding the timing of discussions and, in future, efforts should be made to adopt a programme of work covering a longer period of time.

3. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the programme of work for the coming week, taking into account the concerns expressed by the representative of Australia and on the understanding that the Bureau would adjust it as necessary.

4. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 106: Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors (A/59/162, A/59/318 and Add.1 and A/59/400)

(a) **United Nations** (A/59/5 (Vols. I, III and IV))

(b) **United Nations Development Programme** (A/59/5/Add.1)

(c) **United Nations Children's Fund** (A/59/5/Add.2)

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(j) **Fund of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme** (A/59/5/Add.9)

(k) **United Nations Office for Project Services** (A/59/5/Add.10)

(l) **International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991** (A/59/5/Add.12)

(m) **International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994** (A/59/5/Add.11)

(n) **Capital master plan** (A/59/161)

5. **Mr. Fakie** (Chairman of the Board of Auditors), introducing 16 reports of the Board of Auditors (A/59/5 (Vols. I, III and IV) and Add.1-12 and A/59/161) and the concise summary of principal findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in the reports prepared by the Board of Auditors for the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session (A/59/162), said that, given that all those reports had been submitted before their July slot deadlines and that a number of them had already been edited prior to their transmittal, he was concerned and disappointed that delegations had not received them in a timely manner.

6. Accountability and governance issues had gained prominence in recent years. A number of corporate

collapses had turned the spotlight on to the auditing profession and, as a result, many reforms had been implemented with a view to promoting auditor independence, preventing conflicts of interest, enhancing good governance and improving accountability. The Board of Auditors had been closely monitoring those developments and, where appropriate, participating in reform initiatives.

7. Interaction between the Board, the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) was an important mechanism for the promotion of accountability and transparency. In addition, the Board had supported coordination with other oversight bodies and endeavoured to avoid duplication of efforts while respecting the mandates and responsibilities of those bodies. While it was important to preserve the independence of external auditors and to recognize their specific responsibilities and functions, the promotion of accountability was a collective responsibility.

8. The format of the individual reports was in line with previous practices but, in accordance with the suggestions made by ACABQ and where applicable, each report contained comments on the implementation status of previous recommendations. The concise summary report referred to the progress made by the United Nations and its funds and programmes in the implementation of previous recommendations of the Board. For the biennium 2000-2001, 46 per cent of those recommendations had been fully implemented and 47 per cent were in the process of implementation. The relatively low implementation rate was partly attributable to the significant increase in the number of recommendations, which was, in turn, partly due to the Board's increasing focus on management issues. In addition, the nature of some recommendations meant that more time was required for their implementation.

9. In general, the Administration had endeavoured to implement the Board's recommendations and significant progress had been made in several areas. The Board would continue to follow up on the implementation of its recommendations and would also continue to report separately to the Committee, in every odd year of a biennium, on the status of implementation of its recommendations relating to organizations that operated within a biennial financial period.

10. The Board had modified its audit report on the financial statements of four organizations, namely, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and had, in fact, been unable to express an opinion on the statements of UNOPS because it had been unable to obtain adequate assurances in respect of a number of issues. Furthermore, the Board was concerned that the possible failure of UNOPS to meet its 2004 targets could result in deficits that might not be absorbed by its operational reserve and that no proper system was in place to give reliable estimates of the cost of services provided.

11. While the modified report had not affected the Board's opinion on the financial statements of UNDP, UNFPA and UNDCP, several concerns still remained regarding, inter alia, the lack of adequate controls at UNDP and UNFPA following the implementation of the enterprise resource planning system and the lack of procedures at UNDCP to ensure completeness and timeliness in the recording of field obligations.

12. While organizations had generally complied with the United Nations system accounting standards, the Board had made various recommendations on possible improvements to the presentation and disclosure of the financial statements and reports. With regard to governance principles, the Board noted that none of the organizations had taken steps to address the request of the General Assembly contained in paragraph 6 of its resolution 57/278.

13. Unfunded end-of-service and post-retirement benefits remained a cause for concern. While some organizations, notably UNDP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had provided for funds to cover future liabilities, an aggregate amount exceeding $3 billion remained unfunded as at 31 December 2003. As at the same date, non-expendable equipment amounted to approximately $1.1 billion. While there had been obvious improvements in the areas of custody, control and valuation, the Board had again noted weaknesses at, inter alia, the United Nations, UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and UNOPS relating to inadequate physical inventory counts and inaccurate and unreliable inventory records.

14. The Board had been pleased to note that, in general, improvements had been made that had led to better monitoring and control of programme expenditure for several funds and programmes, including efforts to simplify and harmonize currently inconsistent resource transfer modalities. A number of matters of concern in respect of individual organizations had been highlighted in the relevant reports. Project management was an important component of programme expenditure. It had been difficult to compare financial versus technical implementation, since the respective performance indicators were generally not at the same level of detail, and there was a consequent risk that financial resources could be depleted before projects were completed or, on the other hand, that any excess resources might not be reprogrammed appropriately. The Board had also noted instances in which projects had been operationally closed but remained open in financial terms for long periods of time and, on a related topic, was concerned that 63 United Nations trust funds, with combined reserves and fund balances of $54 million as at 31 December 2003, did not show any expenditures for the biennium 2002-2003 except for transactions pertaining to the investment and other related accounts.

15. The United Nations and several of its funds and programmes managed significant funds in short- or medium-term financial assets or investments, the return on which had been generally close to benchmarks. In the case of UNICEF, the Board had been pleased to note that the recommendations contained in its previous report had been implemented, but in other instances it had found a number of problems relating to guidelines and management.

16. For example, the United Nations Office at Geneva managed an investment portfolio amounting to $375 million (as at 31 December 2003) without an investment policy or committee and, while over 75 per cent of that portfolio came from Geneva-based funds and programmes, there were no formal guidelines or reporting procedures for their respective shares. The former Director of the Investment Management Service of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) had not provided a proper audit trail for real estate investments, which he had personally managed, and the purchase of an office building in New York had not been conducted in a consistent manner. Moreover, the United Nations system maintained a very large number of bank accounts and had encountered some problems in the areas of disclosure and reconciliation. Further steps must also be taken to improve the efficiency of inter-agency transactions, since the Board had found a difference of approximately $22 million between Headquarters' accounting records and those of UNDP.

17. While recognizing the recent initiatives to improve coordination in the area of information and communications technology (ICT), the Board took the view that a comprehensive, system-wide initiative should be implemented. In January 2004, UNDP, in partnership with UNFPA and UNOPS, had migrated its data processing to a new enterprise resource planning system known as Atlas, but, by May 2004, there was still no independently validated comprehensive control framework for that system that would adequately mitigate its control risk. That weakness was compounded by other related deficiencies which, if left unattended, could pose a risk to the operations of other organizations serviced by UNDP.

18. Although external auditors were not directly responsible for preventing or detecting fraud, the Board recognized the need for the United Nations and its funds and programmes to establish a comprehensive fraud prevention policy. A number of organizations had instituted measures in that regard, but they seldom included formal corruption and fraud risk assessment mechanisms or the creation of a fraud prevention committee. In addition, resolution mechanisms for incidents and allegations of corruption and fraud were not always designed or implemented efficiently.

19. The level of unpaid contributions to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), amounting to $34.8 million and $53 million, respectively, had significantly worsened their financial position and led to cross-borrowing from peacekeeping operations. The Board remained concerned that the Tribunals might not be able to complete their work by the 2010 deadline.

20. In a departure from previous practice, the Board had issued a report to the Security Council on the United Nations Compensation Commission covering the biennium 2002-2003. In the past, reports on the Compensation Commission had always been submitted to the General Assembly.

21. **Ms. Mabutas** (Director of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management) said that

the Secretariat was making every effort, in cooperation with the Board of Auditors, to improve its reporting on the implementation of audit recommendations. Under the present procedure, the Secretariat submitted an implementation report to coincide with the Board's biennial audit report. The Secretariat and the Board each submitted a follow-up report in the off years. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/249, beginning in 2005, the two follow-up reports would be consolidated into one report, to be provided by the Board.

22. The Secretariat had taken note of the recommendation contained in the Advisory Committee's report (57/439) that the reports of the Secretary-General on the item should exclude any matters previously communicated to the Board and already reflected in reports to the General Assembly. The Secretariat would also ensure that information on such matters would not be reiterated in other documents. The resulting streamlining would reduce the length of the Secretary-General's reports, result in significant savings, and improve the timeliness of their issuance. A broader review of the reporting process would also take place in the context of resolution 57/278 A. The Secretariat had initiated discussions with the Board's Audit Operations Committee and would consult with the funds and programmes with a view to preparing proposals for submission to the General Assembly.

23. The Secretary-General and the executive heads of funds and programmes were grateful to the Board for the spirit of constructive cooperation in which it discharged its oversight function. The Secretariat's own commitment to the implementation of the Board's recommendations would help to improve the management of resources and efficiency in the United Nations.

24. **Mr. Saha** (Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's report on the item (A/59/400), noted that concern had been expressed about the timing of the report's distribution. The Advisory Committee had submitted its report for processing on 1 October with a requested publication date of 8 October. The report had in fact appeared on 15 October.

25. In paragraph 5 of the report, the Advisory Committee acknowledged the continued improvement in the structural presentation of the Board's reports as well as the greater clarity and transparency of its observations and recommendations on highly technical issues. It continued to encourage the approach of addressing common themes as a means of facilitating analysis by the General Assembly of the Board's recommendations and further streamlining its reports. The Advisory Committee had also encouraged the Board to streamline its reports by expanding the practice of dealing with certain technical issues through management letters.

26. The Advisory Committee's continuing concern about implementation of the Board's recommendations was addressed in paragraphs 9 to 12, where it stated that a statistical approach might not be sufficient for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of oversight bodies. Further efforts were needed to develop a strong culture of accountability. The efficient management of the United Nations and its funds and programmes required that the implementation of the Board's recommendations should become an integral part of work plans, activities and processes, while tools to measure the impact of the Board's recommendations must also be developed.

27. Audit of the United Nations was discussed in paragraphs 13 to 28, where the Advisory Committee took up such matters as the need for better monitoring of trust funds and for the consolidation and/or closure of inactive trust funds, the serious problem of end-of-service liabilities, and the need for a uniformed methodology for determining the total cost of ICT. In paragraph 19, it indicated its intention to revert to the issue of the establishment of an operational reserve in the context of its consideration of the proposed programme budget for 2006-2007. Paragraph 20 dealt with the need to refine the results-based budgeting methodology to go beyond "raw" comparisons of percentages. The Advisory Committee endorsed the Board's recommendations on procurement planning (para. 21) and addressed the harmonization of procurement practices in paragraph 23. It commented on training and consultants in paragraphs 24 to 28.

28. The audit of funds and programmes was taken up in paragraphs 29 to 51 of the report. A number of the issues addressed were the same as or similar to those dealt with for the United Nations itself, including end-of-service liabilities, ICT, consultants, and travel. In paragraph 30, the Advisory Committee pointed to the general need for funds and programmes to pay strict

attention to the full application of existing regulations and rules, especially with regard to the treatment of non-expendable equipment (paras. 31 and 32), outstanding advances (paras. 33 to 35), unliquidated obligations (para. 39), staff regulations and rules (paras. 44 and 45), and consultants (para. 46). The Advisory Committee shared the Board's concern about outstanding issues relating to inter-agency fund balances and expressed the hope that the matter would be resolved through consultations (paras. 36 and 37). It also commented on the United Nations house programme (para. 48), the situation of UNOPS (para. 49), and the UNRWA Provident Fund (para. 51).

29. **Mr. Zellenrath** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and, in addition, Iceland and Norway, said that the reports under the agenda item totalled over 2,000 pages and many of them had been issued too late to receive the attention which they deserved. The Secretariat should take greater account of the need of Member States to study the reports carefully.

30. The concise summary (A/59/162), an essential tool for identifying common issues and deficiencies, gave a clear overview of the Board's most important recommendations and the European Union welcomed the progress made in the implementation of those recommendations. However, action must be taken on the recommendations that had not yet been implemented, especially those dating back to the biennium 1998-1999. It would be interesting to know how much money could have been saved if the recommendations had been implemented on time and why it had taken some programme managers five years or more to act on recommendations. A mandatory time frame for implementation, with clear accountability for managers, might be the way forward.

31. The European Union would welcome action on the recommendations concerning governance principles and best practices. The fact that none of the 16 financial reports mentioned performance in terms of organizational objectives, mandates or system-wide targets was an indication of the need for improvement. It was regrettable that the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the funds and programmes had not acted on the request contained in paragraph 6 of resolution 57/278. A report on the matter must be issued in the near future.

32. The effectiveness of governance was closely linked to effective internal oversight, both at the system-wide level and within organizations, designed to create a culture of accountability. Unfortunately, the efforts of organizations to resort to Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems were marred by serious implementation problems and ERP systems had not resolved the issues connected with inter-agency balances. There seemed, moreover, to be no system-wide coherence in the adaptation of ICT strategies. The Board was right to stress the need for increased inter-agency cooperation on ICT and to call for a system-wide review of the coordination of ICT efforts. The European Union would like to know what savings could already have been achieved on the direct expenditure of $700 million on ICT in the previous biennium alone and how much frustration could have been prevented for the personnel having to deal with the various information technology systems. The Board was also right to stress that more resources needed to be allocated to information technology audits.

33. Serious attention should be given to the matter of unfunded end-of-service liabilities, the prevention of internal corruption and fraud, the management of non-expendable equipment, and procurement.

34. Turning to the individual reports, he said that UNDP, UNFPA and UNDCP seemed to have taken little heed of the Board's earlier recommendations and still did not have their accounts in order, even though they had been the subject of qualified audit opinions only four years previously and had received negative mentions two years previously. The issues highlighted in the concise summary were especially applicable to the three organizations.

35. The European Union was very concerned that the Board had been unable to express an opinion on the UNOPS financial statements. It would welcome comments from the Board, the Controller, the Advisory Committee and the Executive Director of UNOPS on whether the steps taken to correct the situation were sufficient. It would also welcome clarification of whether endorsement by the General Assembly of the Board's recommendations would constitute a sufficient basis for a renewed audit at the Assembly's current session so that the Board could form an opinion of the

financial statements of UNOPS for the biennium ended 31 December 2003.

36. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that the Board's lengthy and informative reports had not been issued in sufficient time for his delegation to analyse the findings and consult with Washington on them. What was now a chronic problem called for innovative thinking by the Committee, and suggestions from the Board would also be welcome. On the basis of an initial reading, the United States generally supported the conclusions of the Board and of the Advisory Committee and believed that the Committee should approve the reports.

37. His delegation noted with satisfaction that a number of bodies had made improvements since the previous biennium and had immediately accepted some of the Board's new recommendations. However, only 46 per cent of the recommendations made in the previous biennium had been fully implemented. Expeditious implementation of audit recommendations would help to ensure that management irregularities were both corrected and prevented from recurring.

38. Despite the Board's previous recommendation that the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts should close trust funds which were no longer required, 63 trust funds remained open with no expenditures in the current biennium, even though their combined reserves and fund balances had totalled $54.1 million at the end of 2003. Comments from the Secretariat about its plans to address the issue would be welcome.

39. There was also a chronic problem in the presentation and disclosure of financial statements by United Nations organizations, owing partly to inconsistencies in accounting policies and financial reporting. His delegation would like to know what steps were being taken to rectify inappropriate practices and harmonize presentations. One area of particular concern was accounting for non-expendable equipment. The auditors had been unable to verify the values disclosed for UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Habitat and UNOPS owing to the breakdown in controls and unavailability of supporting evidence. It had issued "unqualified opinions with emphasis of matter paragraphs" for UNDP and UNFPA. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that the lack of an amortization policy in most organizations might have contributed to the long-standing problem.

40. Because effective oversight was so critical for United Nations activities, the United States was concerned about the problems which the Board had identified in the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and insisted that the Office should address them expeditiously. It would like to know whether the Board had examined other aspects of the OIOS mandate, including the question of whether its reports were submitted to the General Assembly unaltered by the Secretary-General. Poor financial management practices had exposed the organizations to unnecessary risks. Examples included the lack of cash flow forecasting by the United Nations Treasury and the lack of an investment policy for the sum of over $375 million managed by the United Nations Office at Geneva. The Organization should promptly implement the necessary guidelines and procedures, as recommended by the Board. It would be interesting to know who had been held accountable for the serious management breach in Geneva.

41. The auditors had also been unable to give an opinion on the financial statements of UNOPS, whose severe financial problems were exacerbated by its inability to verify its financial position. In paragraph 47 of its report on UNOPS (A/59/5/Add.10), the Board noted that without a proper system to estimate the cost of the services being provided, UNOPS was exposed to the risk of accepting projects from which the resulting income might not contribute to the payment of the organization's fixed costs. His delegation noted the Advisory Committee's intention to look more closely at those issues early in 2005 but would like to know now what steps UNOPS was taking to ensure sound financial control.

42. The issue of the use of consultants, experts and temporary assistance defied correction year after year. The Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute had no selection criteria for consultants. At the Port-of-Spain Office of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), contracts for services were extended without formal evaluation of the work performed. At the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) meanwhile, terms of reference for consultants did not specify the outputs expected. Organizations must comply fully in that regard with the applicable rules

and the Board's recommendations. The United States would revert to the issue when the organizations concerned presented their budgets to the Committee in 2005.

43. Turning to specific issues, he noted that UNDP had had to charge UNDCP $2.2 million for services rendered during previous reporting periods, and that UNDCP had recorded part of the overdue amount as extraordinary charges. His delegation was concerned that such an improper reporting system had been allowed to continue for so long and wondered what was being done to rectify it. In the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, the key post of Director of the Investment Management Service had remained vacant from October 2003 to April 2004. Since OIOS had previously found serious management irregularities in the Service, the vacancy was inexcusable and his delegation would like to know who had been held accountable for the serious management lapses in the Service over many years. His delegation would take up under the appropriate agenda items the question of whether the war crimes tribunals would be able to complete their work by 2010. Some senior staff members of UNFPA had racked up travel costs of $225,000 and he wondered what steps UNFPA had taken to curb such high expenditures. In UNEP, travel advances to "other persons" in the amount of $82,208 had been outstanding for more than 20 months and he wondered what was being done to recover those receivables and to prevent a recurrence of the situation. For its part, UNHCR had not begun to address the General Assembly's request to examine its governance structures, principles and accountability.

44. Effective oversight as conducted by the Board could only make United Nations activities stronger and the Fifth Committee must do whatever was necessary to ensure that managers implemented the Board's recommendations expeditiously.

Agenda item 113: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/59/11 and A/59/67)

45. **Mr. Sessi** (Chairman of the Committee on Contributions), introducing the report of the Committee on Contributions (A/59/11), said that, at its sixty-fourth session, the Committee had considered 10 requests for exemption under Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations. Its conclusions and recommendations thereon were contained in chapter VII of its report. The text of that chapter had been transmitted to the General Assembly in June 2004, and the Fifth Committee had taken action on the matter at its 2nd meeting. A number of comments had been made concerning the observations of the Committee on Contributions on multi-year payment plans. In that connection, he recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolutions 57/4 B and 58/1 B, had endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Contributions concerning multi-year payment plans, as contained in its report on its activities at its sixty-second session (A/57/11, paras. 17 to 23). In considering requests for exemption under Article 19, the Committee on Contributions had been guided by its earlier conclusions and recommendations. For example, it had encouraged all Member States requesting exemption under Article 19 to consider submitting a multi-year payment plan, when possible (A/59/11, para. 38). In a number of specific cases, it had either noted the intention of Member States to submit a payment plan or encouraged them to consider doing so. In no case, however, had it linked submission of a payment plan to exemption under Article 19.

46. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/1 B, the Committee on Contributions had undertaken an initial review of the methodology for the preparation of the scale of assessments drawing on past experience. It had concluded that, in many cases, changes in scale methodology had been a significant factor in scale-to-scale changes in Member States' rates of assessment in recent scales. In that context, it had agreed that, while the scale methodology should not be too rigid, any proposals for change should be seen in the light of its earlier conclusion that part of its mandate was to promote stability in the scale methodology. Concerning possible systematic criteria for deciding when market exchange rates (MERs) should be replaced with price-adjusted rates of exchange (PAREs) or other appropriate conversion rates for the preparation of the scale of assessments, it had decided to pursue its consideration of the matter at its sixty-fifth session on the basis of additional data from the Statistics Division. It had concluded that the revised method of calculating PAREs posed serious conceptual and practical problems and should not be considered further. It would review other elements of the scale methodology at its sixty-fifth session with a view to reaching preliminary conclusions concerning the methodology to be used for the preparation of the scale of assessments for the period 2007-2009 in order to assist

the General Assembly in considering that question at its sixtieth session. It would, of course, draw on any guidance provided by the Fifth Committee in the course of the debate.

47. The Committee on Contributions had continued its consideration of the criteria for ad hoc adjustments of the rates of assessment. It had noted that, over almost 60 years, there had been only a relatively limited number of appeals for a change of assessments and that changes in response to such appeals had been very rare. In that connection, it had recalled and reaffirmed its earlier conclusion that the circumstances surrounding requests for a change of assessments should be truly exceptional and extraordinary to warrant such a change. It had agreed that it would not therefore be feasible to elaborate standard criteria for considering future requests, which would have to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

48. In considering the status of multi-year payment plans, the Committee on Contributions had had before it the report of the Secretary-General on multi-year payment plans (A/59/67) and information on the status of implementation of payment plans as at 25 June 2004, which was reproduced in the table in chapter V of its report (A/59/11). The payment plans of Georgia and the Niger had not included provision for payments in 2003. The Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan were current with planned payments, while São Tome and Principe was not. By 25 June 2004, the Niger and Tajikistan had exceeded their scheduled payments for 2004, and Georgia had paid the full amount. The Government of the Central African Republic had indicated its intention to submit a payment plan. The Government of Guinea-Bissau was keeping the matter under consideration and would establish a payment plan as a matter of priority, once the situation in the country stabilized. While relatively few payment plans had been submitted and implementation had been uneven, the Committee on Contributions had reaffirmed its earlier conclusion that they were a useful tool for reducing Member States' unpaid assessments and a way for them to demonstrate their commitment to meeting their financial obligations to the United Nations.

49. With regard to measures to encourage the payment of arrears, the Committee on Contributions had been provided with information on measures used by other organizations of the United Nations system, which was summarized in annex I to its report (A/59/11). A number of the measures it had previously contemplated would be tied to timely payment of assessed contributions. It had therefore concluded that it might be prudent to fix the deadline for timely payment from the date of issuance of the assessments, rather than from the date of their receipt, as was currently provided for, and to extend the deadline from 30 to 35 days. It had reaffirmed that conclusion and a draft amendment to the relevant financial regulation had been included in annex II to its report for consideration by the General Assembly.

50. The Committee on Contributions had noted that, since separate accounts were maintained for the regular budget, the two international tribunals and each of the peacekeeping operations, Member States might have outstanding assessments in some accounts and credit balances in others. It had therefore recommended that the General Assembly should encourage Member States in that position to authorize the Secretariat to apply the credits to the amounts outstanding so as to reduce the overall level of outstanding assessed contributions. In addition, it had decided to continue its consideration of the proposal that only Member States current with their financial obligations to the United Nations should receive a credit in respect of budgetary surpluses. It would also consider further the idea of a composite approach, whereby penalties or incentives would be applied depending on the date of receipt of assessed contributions. It had agreed that its conclusion that interest on arrears should only be applied to arrears arising after the adoption of the related decision should also apply to any other similar measures that the Assembly might adopt. It had considered a wide variety of other measures to encourage payment of arrears (A/59/11, para. 28). However, it had decided not to consider those proposals further without more specific guidance from the Assembly.

51. As at 25 June 2004, 16 Member States had been in arrears in the payment of their assessed contributions under the terms of Article 19 of the Charter. He was pleased to note that three Member States, Benin, Cape Verde and Mauritania, had subsequently paid the amount necessary for the restoration of their vote in the General Assembly. In its resolution 59/1, the Assembly had decided that 11 Member States would be permitted to vote until 30 June 2005. Accordingly, two Member States, Chad and Malawi, currently had no vote in the Assembly. Lastly, he noted that, in 2003, the Secretary-General

had accepted the equivalent of $2 million from four Member States in non-United States dollar currencies acceptable to the Organization.

52. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on multi-year payment plans (A/59/67), which was submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 57/4 B and 58/1 B and contained information on the status of implementation of the payment plans of Georgia, the Niger, the Republic of Moldova, São Tome and Principe and Tajikistan as at 31 December 2003. Updated data was provided in the report of the Committee on Contributions (A/59/11).

53. **Mr. Zellenrath** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and, in addition, Iceland and Norway, endorsed the observations and recommendations contained in the two reports just introduced. Two major factors determined the financial health of the United Nations system, namely, proper management of resources by the organizations and provision of predictable financial contributions by Member States. Member States should therefore adhere to the rules they set for themselves and pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions. While the European Union recognized that circumstances might prevent that, it nevertheless expected Member States to demonstrate their commitment to honour their obligations and reduce their arrears over time by submitting multi-year payment plans and striving to implement them. It believed that submission of such plans should be a precondition for the granting of exemptions under Article 19 of the Charter.

54. **Mr. Renault** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Group acknowledged the work of the Committee on Contributions in its capacity as an independent technical organ of the General Assembly. He trusted that, in considering the methodology for the preparation of the scale of assessments for the period 2007-2009, it would take account of the adverse effects of the current methodology on developing countries. It should carefully review the situation of countries that had experienced substantial increases in their assessed contributions and make proposals for correcting those distortions. He noted that the States members of the Rio Group had experienced the largest increase in assessments since 2000. The new methodology should also take account of the external debt burden of States. Multi-year payment plans were and should remain voluntary and should not be linked to the granting of exemptions under Article 19 of the Charter. Measures to encourage the payment of arrears should be positive, rather than punitive, in nature. In that context, the Group welcomed the recommendation contained in paragraph 32 of the report of the Committee on Contributions (A/59/11).

55. **Mr. Terzi** (Turkey) said that, if the United Nations was to achieve its important and urgent goals, Member States must provide it with a stable and predictable cash flow. The creation and maintenance of a dynamic database, in close cooperation with Member States, would enable ad hoc adjustments to the rates of assessment to be made consistently and in conformity with the principles of transparency and objectivity. Efforts to establish clear-cut criteria for such adjustments should continue. Concerning the methodology for future scales of assessments, the time lag between the base period and the scale period should be reduced so that the most up-to-date data was used and the scale better reflected Member States' capacity to pay. Economic data should be collected on a continuous basis in order to facilitate ad hoc adjustments. Lastly, his delegation agreed that multi-year payment plans were a useful tool for reducing Member States' unpaid assessments and a way for them to demonstrate their commitment to meeting their financial obligations to the United Nations.

Other matters

56. **Mr. Elnaggar** (Egypt) said that delegates wishing to gain access to the Headquarters building by motor vehicle had experienced long delays because of bottlenecks at the garage entrance. He asked whether the Administration was contemplating measures to reduce the delays, including the deployment of additional security officers to perform vehicle security checks.

57. **The Chairman** said that the Secretariat officials responsible would reply to those questions at the Committee's next formal meeting.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.